

Heritage as an Alternative Driver for Sustainable Development and Economic Recovery in South East Europe

## Identifying Cultural Tourism Potentials in Republic of Moldova through Cultural Consumption among Tourists

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### Abstract

In last decades, tourism development in Moldova has improved in terms of tourist flows, both as a diversification of tourism demand and tourism products. These improvements give grounds for an optimistic prognosis for the tourist industry in Moldova. Regarding this, authors revisits the phenomenon of cultural tourism in the country, in order to identify cultural tourism potential through cultural consumption among tourists, applying a special tourism survey. At the same time, there are a number of factors which may endanger sustainable development of tourism in Moldova, this is due primary by a imperfect cultural management that risks to endanger cultural heritage from the country. Another critical limitation on the development of cultural tourism is the low involvement of the population in cultural and tourist events held in the country. The study concludes that current situation calls for a more flexible and innovative approach to tourism industry development in the country.

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### 1. Introduction

Worldwide many agencies, institutions and individuals involved in economic development programs have recognized the need to help developing countries in preserving cultural resources, referring to cultural values. Restoration of historic centers provide means for social revitalization of communities and neighborhoods,

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physical access to historic buildings as an important indicator of life quality and a key factor in improving the social inclusion.

National cultural heritage should be considered an important tourist attraction in terms of intrinsic peculiarities, as well as for its continuing growth in cultural purposes, related to the history of different cultures and civilizations. In many cases, the main motivation for tourist trips is the recreation, as tourists can take advantage of their stay in a certain region, visit historical and archaeological sites, museums, attend festivals and cultural events, etc. This makes the cultural heritage an important tourist resource, increasing the tourism potential of an area. In specialized literature there are many international studies on cultural tourism (Richards, Bonink, McIntosh, Goeldner, P. Origet of Cluzeau, etc.) and its impact on economic growth. Cultural tourism appears as a type of tourism clearly differentiated from the others, especially through the motivation, and can be defined as a form of tourism mobility whose primary goal is to broaden the horizon of knowledge by discovering artistic or architectural heritage and territories.

## **2. Data and Methodology**

Based on tourist survey, the consumer behavior of cultural tourism services in terms of perception of touristic objectives from Calarasi county has been studied in two steps. The first part of the study was focused on the visitors of cultural sites' perception. The second part was focused on identifying features and behaviors of cultural tourism consumption, which initially has been grouped into two categories: respondents from Calarași county and other respondents, including foreign tourists. The interview technique "face to face", based on a special questionnaire elaborated by the authors, was used for the cultural tourism consumption study. The main purpose of the research was to study the perception of visitors regarding cultural tourism heritage. The results of these survey are crucial for observing trends related to cultural tourism consumption in Calarasi county.

## **3. Analysis and findings**

### *3.1. Background: heritage and cultural tourism*

In the 20th century, the concept of heritage gains power, divided into tangible and intangible aspects and subdivisions - the movable and immovable assets, covering all areas of human interest in recognizing and preserving past and present values. Cultural heritage in many countries is seen as an important factor of quality of life, being an important source of income (Zbucnea, 2008). Many countries get income mainly from tourism activities generated by cultural heritage. The existence of an important cultural heritage from the qualitative and quantitative point of view generates many investments and leads to a large number of permanent or temporary jobs. This phenomenon leads to an increase of the local government revenue, a raise in the living standards of the inhabitants of the region. It also increases the attractiveness of the area and the number of tourists from the country and abroad.

According to OECD (2009), more than 50% of tourist activities in Europe are generated by cultural tourism and cultural heritage. This is also confirmed by U.S. Historic Preservation data (National Trust for Historic Preservation) - the increase of cultural tourism generates a number of benefits such as: creating new jobs and businesses; increasing income from taxes; diversifying the local economy; creating opportunities for partnerships; preserving the traditions and culture; generating local investments in historical monuments. The European Commission encourages travels on the continent as a tool to promote European cultural values (OECD, 2009), thus promoting cultural tourism as "*unity in diversity*". The travel through different countries

will produce new cultural experiences, and this fact will allow tourists to appreciate the cultural difference.

### 3.2. Cultural heritage of the Republic of Moldova

Republic of Moldova has a rich cultural heritage, with more than 140 cultural heritage sites that may be of great interest to tourists (the earliest visible remains of the built heritage are Geto-Dacian sites and Roman fortifications). The remains of medieval fortresses, archaeological complexes such as Orheiul Vechi, cave monasteries, nobles' mansions and peasant houses offer a diversity of visitor attractions. Chisinau, the capital city, features a good number of cultural heritage monuments, fine examples of domestic architecture from the 19th and 20th centuries, which might be considered as tourist attractions as well. Moldova has 87 museums with rich collections of art and are mostly housed in buildings of a special architectural importance. Part of the national tourist product is the variety of cultures represented in different parts of the country. The Republic of Moldova is an amalgam of many nationalities and cultures with many traditions, languages, folklore, cooking, etc. According to official web page of Moldova, there are over 880 folk music groups in the Republic of Moldova, most of them reflecting the distinct traditions of their districts and ethnic origins. It is worth mentioning the national craftsmanship for its cultural value and also because it supplies souvenirs for tourists. Considering the competitiveness index, Moldova ranked on the 99th place from 139 countries according to The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report (2011), and on the last position – the 42nd according to the European level in 2011, while back in 2009, it took the 93rd position at the international level. In 2013, Moldova was placed on the 42nd position according to the European level, but globally registred a decline, beeing ranked on the 102nd place.

Table 1. The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2013 and 2011, regional comparison

Indicators	Moldova		Russia		Ukraine		Romania	
	2011	2013	2011	2013	2011	2013	2011	2013
The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index T&T								
Regional	42	42	33	33	39	37	34	35
Global	99	102	59	63	85	76	63	68
T&T regulatory framework	68	66	73	92	64	60	51	66
of which:								
Policy rules and regulations	81	81	126	123	107	114	63	87
Environmental sustainability	78	93	98	134	88	92	50	58
Safety and security	65	61	113	113	82	77	35	63
Health and hygiene	49	41	11	14	17	8	59	54
Prioritization of T&T	115	112	102	111	101	84	80	103
Business environment and infrastructure	98	97	53	46	76	71	66	68
of which :								
Air transport infostructure	128	125	30	33	93	78	81	93
Ground transport infostructure	124	123	95	93	74	73	101	108
Tourism infostructure	93	91	45	40	53	50	38	34
ICT infostructure	65	66	46	37	68	70	49	59
Price competitiveness in the T&T industry	54	41	75	72	119	110	80	84
T&T human, cultural and natural resources	129	133	45	58	118	99	66	73
of which:								
Human resources	97	102	78	92	68	65	63	83
Affinity for T&T	75	112	136	138	117	101	95	112
Natural resources	132	135	27	37	119	102	94	88
Cultural resources	121	125	35	39	86	80	41	41

Source: WEF, The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013, 2011

At regional level, Moldova must improve its T&T indicators in order to be competitive and to use those indicators that can enhance domestic tourism industry. Authors consider that indicator of price competitiveness of domestic T&T industry can be used to attract tourists on the regional level, offering high

tourism service and a competitive market.

According to The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report (2013), in the past years, at the bottom of the European rankings there are a number of Balkan countries such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova. In line with their less-advanced development countries, they will require significant investments in upgrading the infrastructure needed to support healthy and growing T&T sectors.

### 3.3. Ensuring the preservation of Moldova's cultural heritage

In the late 19th - early 20th century, Moldova is marked by the first attempts to investigate the cultural heritage monuments for restoration and valorification. With the establishment of the *Societatea Arheologica Bisericeasca* (Church Archaeological Society) in the early 20th century and adoption of the law for preservation and restoration of historical monuments in Moldova (1919), this period was focused on the protection, preservation and restoration of cultural heritage, as well as on research of historical monuments from the country. A useful measure on that time was to take pictures for the first time of all historical monuments from the country. But over a decade, due to violent history of World War I and II, our country lost most significant and important architectural monuments; and after the independence of Moldova (1991), state policy was determined according to EU legislation on the protection, conservation and valorification of the historic-architectural heritage.

A significant contribution to the inspection and protection of monuments of cultural interest is being made by the Agency for Inspection and Restoration of Monuments from Moldova, which maintains a strict evidence of buildings number of both national and local significance, publishing a series of studies and researches in this area. However, nowadays there is attested a poor cultural management in this area, both locally as well as nationally, confirmed by the growing number of destroyed monuments, unreasonable or nonconforming use of monetary destination. Moreover, a constraint in the restoration of architectural monuments is the sectorial strategy that gives priority to other objectives, in detriment to *Protection and enhancement of the national heritage*. In this context, the research on cultural tourism in Moldova is pretty new; the statistical calculation methodology is rather limited, or even not considered by various cultural institutions at certain events. Also, studies related to the economic impact on cultural tourism are insignificant or there are not at all.

Although it has a small area, Moldova as a tourist destination has a great potential with unusual diversity of landscape reservations or scenery and unique geological monuments of European and world value. The primary forms of Moldova's tourism, as innovative element of heritage valorification are: rural, wine, cultural, health and beauty tourism (Percinschi, 2012). In Moldova, there are 142 well-famous wineries, of which 23 have experience and facilities to receive visitors (best known at international level are: Milestii Mici, Cricova, Purcari, Cojusna, etc.); and exceptional balneoclimateric health resorts such as "Bucuria-sind", "Codru", "Nufarul Alb", etc. Another innovation form of national cultural heritage valorification applied in Moldova is the architectural lighting projects (Gribincea, 2013). There are being lighted over 10 cultural sights of tourism interest in the capital, increasing in that way the number of visitors.

### 3.4. General overview of cultural-tourism consumption

The correct presentation of national heritage authenticity and tourist objectives is of a great importance for Moldova. It is vital for the success of rehabilitation programs that public authorities prove their responsibility and fully involvement in the project implementation. Given the standardized categories of cultural tourism, it is considered a visited country the one where tourist stayed the longest period of time. The length of stay depends not only on the individual goals of the tourists, but also on the attractiveness of the places. So, the core form of cultural tourism is to meet the spiritual needs and perfection of cultural tourist formation, as well as to visit historical sites, museums, art galleries, etc., by forming separate tours.

Tourist consumption as an expression of solvent demand of the population for tourism services, and equivalent to the tourist offer in time and space, consists of expenditure incurred by carriers of tourism demand for the purchase of goods and services related to tourist motivation. During 1991-2000 cultural tourism consumption shows a decline. A cause of these impairments can be considered the massive impoverishment of the population. Since 2001 the total number of consumers of cultural services increased slightly, which is due in particular to the increasing number of libraries, visits to museum and cultural diversification of services (e.g. are organized annually over 20 festivals, competitions, local fairs and other cultural events).

Revenue from tourists services are constantly growing, including domestic tourism. Revenue from foreigners services in Moldova are comparable with service revenue from Moldovan tourists abroad. Qualitative analysis of daily receipts per tourist service of travel agencies demonstrates that spendings of foreign tourists in Moldova are consistent and constantly growing by 30.5% annually. Regional tourism market is growing, and the increased number of tourists served by the national tourism industry remains a priority. Between 2003-2010, also increased spendings of Moldovan tourists that travel abroad with an average about 45% annually. In Moldova, daily expenditure of served tourist increased by 38.5% annually, so the national tourists are the main clients for tourism agencies and therefore the most important consumers of domestic and international travel.

### *3.5. Impacts from tourists and local residents' perception*

The present study is exploratory and included 35 cultural monuments from the Calarasi county. The total sample included 500 respondents, including city-municipality sample of 250 respondents. The analysis of consumer behavior of cultural tourism services versus the perception of monuments and institutions with tourism - cultural value, has identified the main problems in the field: most of respondents are poorly informed, the accessibility to heritage sites is restricted or inaccessible, the management of cultural heritage tourism is unclear, and scientific-cultural activities are insufficient promoted to be valorificated at their maximum potential.

The identification of consumer's profile of cultural tourism in Moldova, allowed concluding that the most of cultural tourism consumers in Moldova are adolescents and young people up to 30 years old, mainly women, pupils or students of Orthodox religion, being in a relation or married. Cultural consumer preferences are focused on visiting concert halls with a frequency of once every two months or every six months. Acceptable amount for cultural tourism expenditure is about 100-200lei (5-10EUR). Most of the consumers are informed through street posters or by family members. Study of consumer profile of cultural tourism abroad showed that foreign consumers are adults aged between 30-55 years and adolescents up to 16 years old, predominantly female, employed, of Orthodox religion, most unmarried. Most of foreigners come to Moldova during the year, the average length of stay is of three days, preferring to visit museums; while the acceptable expenditure is about 400lei (25 EUR), and the main source of information is Internet.

## **4. Conclusion**

The theoretical base of cultural tourism phenomenon in Moldova results in a huge potential of tourism resources, which currently are unknown and unexplored. The economic benefits of exploiting these resources are extremely large, mainly for underdeveloped tourist areas and for entire economy. Official data statistics are not relevant enough for the investigation of various forms of tourism, including cultural tourism. Events and cultural events in the country and in the capital city have insufficient magnitude in order to be converted

into tourist destination; also most of the consumers are poorly informed. Informative advertising and cultural institutions demonstrate that texts are unattractive, the information is incomplete and only partially useful for cultural tourists. Research of international practice has shown that there are many studies, cultural tourism specialized institutions and centers in many countries, especially in France, Italy, Australia, etc. In this context, a precise definition of cultural tourism is quite difficult. The estimation of cultural tourism consumption in Moldova is quite difficult, because there are a number of barriers, such as a lack of statistical evidence, information asymmetry and the extent of cultural events, etc. Official data statistics are not relevant for the investigation of various forms of tourism, including cultural tourism. The analysis shows that cultural heritage tourism in Calarasi county has a huge cultural and economic potential, but is monitored, protected and valorificated inappropriately. Many architectural monuments of local or national significance of Calarasi county are being destroyed or ruined. The development of cultural tourism potential of the country is possible due to the determination of marketing policies and practices as an instrument of exploitation and development of cultural heritage tourism, which would make the growth of rural cultural tourism sector, multiplication of cultural tourism offer and a better knowledge of consumer behaviour, eliminating the problems of small number of visitors and insufficient funds for proper management of the property. Transforming the passive consumer visitors into active communication partners, also presents a way of increasing the degree of exploitation of cultural heritage tourism in Moldova, and can be achieved by using modern technology of marketing mix "7P".

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